

Voter's Guide: Registration and Voting in Indiana

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gary L. Crawley", is written over a horizontal line.

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I chose to do this project because I can still remember what it was like the first time I went to vote: It felt as though I had entered a cave of stippled light and shadow, there were flutterings and murmurings and sudden explosive noise by entering voters, who were met with a wave of greetings by people they knew working the election. I just stood back and collected the images from around me, because I realized I didn't know what to do.

The first step I took was researching the relevant Indiana Election Codes. I was overwhelmed by the magnitude and complexity of election-related legislation. I spent hours analyzing and copying information. After I realized I had accumulated enough material to intimidate even the most perspicacious researcher, I knew it was time to begin indexing and sorting the information. I had very little knowledge of what information was applicable to creating a voter's guide and what was not. Therefore, my next step was to contact the State Election Board.

Brad King, whom I believe is an attorney for the State Election Board, was an invaluable resource. Mr. King provided ideas and suggestions on what to include in the guide, along with simplified explanations of the National Voter Registration Act and the election-related legislation dealing with military personnel. Mr. King also put me in contact with several county's Voter Registration, Election Board, and/or Clerk's offices. The county officials I contacted were extremely helpful. Several provided lists on the most frequently asked questions they received from people wanting to register to vote. With this information, I was able to assemble a booklet including information on registration and voting in Indiana. When I completed the booklet, I contacted the Delaware County Democratic and Republican Headquarters.

My original intent for contacting the two major political parties was not very clear. I wanted both of the parties to define what they believe is needed by voters and to gather any other information I could. The people I spoke to at the Delaware County Democratic Headquarters were not interested in helping. Therefore, I dealt solely with the Delaware County Republican Headquarters. The information I received from Republican Headquarters was very similar to the material I already had, but I was able to walk a precinct with Melissa Reeder, a precinct vice-committeeman, and talk to people who had not yet registered to vote. This experience was unparalleled. I brought my booklet with me and asked people's opinions of what they would like to see included and what should be excluded. I believe this was the most valuable contribution to my project. I hope now that I have finished this project, people who have not yet registered to vote or are voting for the first time will not feel intimidated by the process, as I was.

Finally, I felt it was important to include a few short sentences on what I would do differently. I would begin my project by walking a precinct, I would have saved a tremendous amount of time by doing this first. I also would use local resources, after the long-distance telephone calls were made and faxes were sent, I realized I would have saved money and received the same information by calling Delaware County Registration and Election Officials. Most importantly, I would start early and make plenty of copies. I had the unfortunate experience of having my computer crash with the disc in the drive, losing all of the material I had originally intended on using.